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23 January 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR: DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR (PLANS)

SUBJECT: Publicity and Public Relations -- Question Raised by  
Mr. James Reston of the New York Times with Mr.  
[redacted] Concerning Covert Psychological War-  
fare Measures

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1. This memorandum will confirm a conversation which I had today with Mr. Dulles in which I raised with him a question of publicity and public relations. [redacted] informed me last night of a conversation which he had just had with Mr. James Reston of the New York Times. Mr. Reston indicated that he proposed to write an article or perhaps a series of articles concerning the effort which the government is making in the field of psychological warfare with particular reference to the covert aspects of this effort. Mr. Reston took the position that the public and the Congress are becoming increasingly interested in this subject and that it is necessary to satisfy this interest by some form of assurance that something is being done by the government in the field. [redacted] said to me he had ducked the question temporarily but felt obligated to give Mr. Reston some kind of an answer very soon. He asked me whether he should refer Mr. Reston to myself. I told Mr. [redacted] that he should not refer Mr. Reston to me, and I suggested that he tell Mr. Reston that "consideration is being given to his inquiry by the appropriate authorities". [redacted] wanted to know whether he could also inform Mr. Reston that in the event of a decision in favor of giving out information on this general subject that Mr. Reston would be one of the first to be informed. He said that unless he could tell Mr. Reston this he believed that Mr. Reston would undertake to write a speculative piece which could be misleading and damaging. I told [redacted] that I saw no objection to his making this additional statement to Mr. Reston, providing that he was careful not to include or infer any promise that there would be a disclosure of information in this connection.

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2. Mr. Reston's inquiry serves to highlight and point up a problem which has been growing increasingly large and troublesome for some time. It is true that the public and the Congress have become very aware of the possibilities of psychological warfare ("the battle for men's minds")

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and more recently that there has been a widespread demand for extensive exploitation of covert measures. The [ ] and other efforts of this kind have further stimulated interest and attracted attention. The announcement in late August of the establishment of the National Psychological Strategy Board drew press comment in the United States and abroad all out of proportion to the significance of this development. Certain of our advisors, including General Magruder, have been of the opinion for some time that it would do no harm and probably much good if the public and the Congress could be made aware of the fact that a serious and responsible effort is being made in the field.

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3. The problem is, therefore, to decide what our position should be, and if this question should be resolved favorably to giving out some form of assurance, what the means and extent of the giving should be. It is my own view that it should be possible to find a formula which would sufficiently satisfy public and Congressional inquiries without at the same time giving any information to the Russians which they do not already have or assume. I do not think that the CIA should be identified as the operative Agency, and my thought as to the manner in which this could be handled would be to tie the release up with an announcement of some new development in the general propaganda and psychological warfare field. The difficulty here is to find the proper event or development to which the release could be related. This might take the form of an announcement made in connection with the appointment of the overall coordinator for the national psychological warfare effort (this is the matter which is still unresolved as between the Departments of State and Defense and the JCS, and which I discussed in this connection with Mr. Dulles in the conversation mentioned above).

h. Your advice and guidance on this matter will be most appreciated. [ ] will be expecting some word from us in the not too distant future.

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5. Irrespective of what the determination should be as regards the giving out of some kind of information (reassurance) to the public or the press, there remains the necessity for arriving at some procedure and formula for dealing with serious members of the Congress who consider that they have a legitimate interest in knowing something about what is going on. Congressional inquiries continue to reach us in many ways, usually via representatives of the Departments of State and Defense who are exposed to Congressional appropriations and foreign relations committees. For example, about two weeks ago, [ ] was jumped on the same day by members of the House and Senate subcommittees

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of the respective foreign relations committees--with a series of questions as to what is being done in the covert PW field. In accordance with a previously agreed formula, [ ] replied that the members of the Congress could rest assured that measures in this field were receiving appropriate consideration in the Government; that he (Mr. [ ]) did not think the Congressmen would want to know too much of the details and that if his questioners would consider this carefully he felt sure that they would agree; and finally that if after such reflection some of his questioners still felt a compulsion upon them to know more, he [ ] would undertake to see to it that they would be contacted by the appropriate officials. According to Mr. [ ] this formula worked successfully on this occasion, as it has on other occasions in the past--except for one questioner who was adamant. This was Congresswoman Bolton of Ohio who was insistent upon being placed in touch with an official who could and would talk frankly to her. (I have discussed this matter with Mr. Houston, who undertook to raise the problem with the Director or yourselves--but I have not heard from him.)

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